



Egbert Benson HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RED HOOK

P.O. Box 1813 Red Hook, N.Y. 12571-0397

RED HOOK CENTRAL SCHOOL 60TH ANNIVERSARY by Clare O'Neill Carr

FALL 1999

Red Hook Central School Unveiled 60 Years Ago

Sixty years ago, in August 1939, the town of Red Hook (population 3,400) was awaiting the opening of the brand new Red Hook Central School on Linden Avenue with all the enthusiasm and optimism of a John Philip Sousa march.

A special 20-page edition of the *Red Hook Advertiser* proclaimed in banner headlines and outsized type, "Red Hook sets forth on a new era in education!" Its standing editorial "Red Hook Needs: A New School," which had headed the opinion page of editor/publisher Alise Cotter Norton for the last several years, was gone. The school board was heralded for being "alert and farsighted"; the town was praised for being "favored beyond average, in the high caliber of its citizens"; and the mayor and supervisor were quoted as sharing the pride (and some of the credit) for the "erection of an educational center of which any community, no matter how large or progressive, may well be proud." Articles were presented from the oldest graduate in Red Hook (Clara Cookingham, class of 1906), former Principals, New York State Rural Education officials and the federal Works Progress Administration, the New Deal institution that funded and built the huge red brick Georgian Colonial on Linden Avenue - accurately described by one writer as "one of the most beautiful high schools in the state."

The new school, which cost \$455,000 to build, nearly half of which was paid for under a \$204,000 grant from the new Works Progress Administration in Washington, was about to be dedicated after four years of planning, arguing, fund drives and petition gathering. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, President of the United States and Hudson Valley neighbor from Hyde Park, was scheduled to come. The school, which even today looks as if it came out of a Norman Rockwell painting, represented the most up-to-date design, with rooms devoted to innovative educational departments like Home Economics, Industrial Arts, Agriculture and Business Science. The kindergarten, a separate room with large bay windows and small-scale furniture made to fit the child, was praised as the finest available to any children, anywhere. There were such innovative features as a nurse's suite, gym lockers for boys and girls, showers and special offices for the Principal and his staff. Busing would be instituted for the first time, bringing students to the central school from hamlets and towns as far away as Clermont and Jackson Corners.

For 135 years, Red Hook had been a town of small one- and two-room schoolhouses. These small schools served first-through eighth-grade "scholars," as students were called in the first public schools, and were scattered throughout Red Hook and the adjacent Milan township. There were ten district schools in Red Hook and four in Milan. Red Hook District #4 in the Village of Red Hook served as the high school as well, for the few students in the outlying districts who went beyond the eighth grade. The old Union school had been built in 1906 to much acclaim, replacing a 19th-century wooden District #4 school. Clara Ham Cookingham, mother of Oakleigh Cookingham of the village of Red Hook, became Red Hook's first graduate that same year; she was also the only graduate.

But by 1935, conditions were becoming crowded as more and more children decided to go to high school. There was much talk about expanding the old high school. There were by then approximately 650 students in the ten districts plus Clermont, and



Red Hook School, District #4. Built around 1875,
it was replaced in 1905

most of these students who chose to go to high school came to the Union High School in the village of Red Hook. They traveled from Nevis, Milan, Upper Red Hook, Clermont, Elizaville, Barrytown and Annandale to attend. They would come by horse and wagon in the earlier days; they would sometimes catch the old New England Railroad train from Cokertown and points east and west of the village, as the milk train made its way through Red Hook between Rhinebeck's New York Central connection and Connecticut, stopping at farms and hamlets along the way. Some, like the late Alise Cotter Norton, who lived on a farm in Milan, caught a ride with father's milk wagon, as it went to meet the train at the village terminal, near what is now Mac's Agway on Firehouse Lane. And like Alise, they boarded with families in the village during the winter school term. Norton was first a reporter, then editor and eventually publisher and owner of the *Red Hook Advertiser* from the 1920s to the 1950s.

However the events of April 2, 1936 would force a solution to the school overcrowding in Red Hook. A fire broke out at the old school at 2 A.M. during the Easter Recess. A truck driver passing through the sleeping town raised the alarm, and fire companies soon converged from Pine Plains, Rhinebeck and Hudson. The Principal, G. Laverne Carr, roused by the fire alarm, braved the burning building to retrieve some records and typewriters, but the Union School could not be saved. By morning, it was burnt to the ground. The fire, which was ruled entirely accidental, became, however, opportune. It forced a decision to centralize the Red Hook districts at a time when few schools in New York State had yet to abandon the one-room schoolhouse approach to education. It put Red Hook in the forefront of public school education, and initiated its reputation for excellence and progress in its public schools, a reputation that continues to distinguish the town to this day.

The school board lost no time in acting that spring vacation. Within ten days, returning elementary students from District #4 were housed in various spots in the village, including in the old Red Hook Hotel barn and the Lutheran chapel. High-school students were transported to Pine Plains Central School, which had just centralized a few years before. Graduation took place that year at the Lyceum Theater. By the fall of 1937, high-school students and administration offices were housed in the Hoffman Inn (now The Grand Dutchess Bed & Breakfast) on North Broadway, which would remain their home for the next three years.

Inevitably there was debate over whether to centralize and build one big school for elementary and high-school students alike – a new idea at the time, however one that was being pushed by the state Rural Education Department in

Albany. The alternative was to rebuild the old high school on the same spot on South Broadway and retain the individual district system. The debate dominated the public school-board meetings, which were held in those days in the old Aucock Building (site of the C&R Deli), the Lyceum Theater, Lutheran Chapel or Methodist Chapel. At least one school-board president resigned. The public, however, made their preference clear when the annual school budget, which included money to bus high-school students to Rhinebeck was soundly defeated. That seemed to tip the balance, and the school board, rallying, met Aug. 6 to propose the town request permission



Red Hook Union Free School. Built in 1905 and enlarged in 1925 to accommodate elementary- and high-school classes, it burned down in 1936



Miss M. Coon's third-and-fourth-grade class, photographed in front of the Red Hook Union Free School in 1928

from Albany to keep the students in town in their temporary quarters and investigate a centralization plan for Red Hook. The board had already filed an application with the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works in Washington for a grant to build a new school.

The real work began then. All eleven districts – Clermont in Columbia County, the eleventh, asked to be included in the central plan – had to be surveyed and interviewed. Petitions had to be gathered from all districts. Parents volunteered to contact each district household in each district to push the plan. Speakers came from Albany and other centralized districts throughout the state to speak to Red Hook taxpayers. Approvals had to be obtained from Albany and funds from Washington secured. Finally, on Oct. 26, 1937 “teachers and pupils with banners and placards, marched to the Methodist Chapel,” where voters from all eleven districts met to decide the fate of the school. They passed the proposition resoundingly by 866 to 117 votes.

Ten “country schoolhouses” consolidated with Clermont to form the centralized Red Hook Central School District

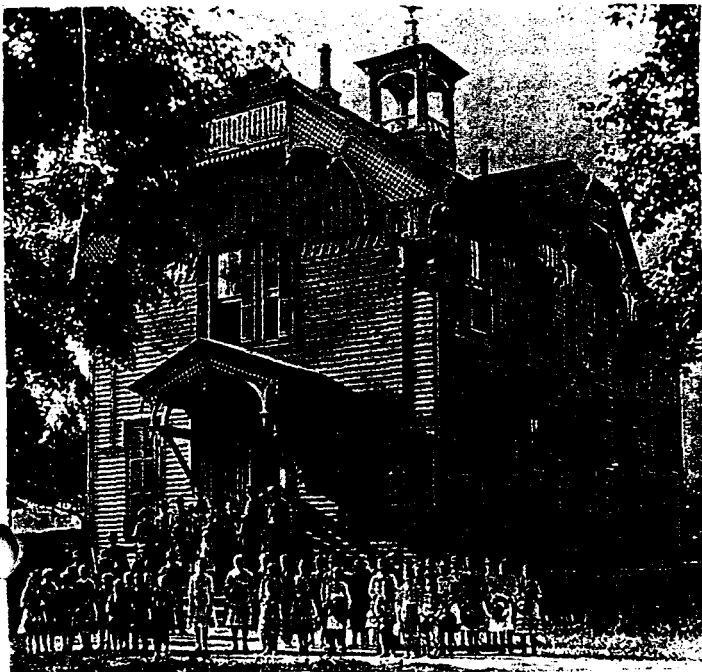
Eleven neighborhood country districts disbanded that summer of 1939 in preparation for busing their students to the new central school district in Red Hook village. The district ranged from simple one-room schoolhouses in the hills of rural Milan, to the relatively elegant two-story Upper Red Hook Academy. Many can be seen today, converted into private houses or shops. But in 1939, they formed the center of each small community in the greater township, hosting social meetings, entertainments, community suppers and civic gatherings:

The Elmendorph School – District #1

Situated near the corner of present-day Budd’s Corners Road and Whalesback Road just northwest of the village of Red Hook, the Elmendorph School, District #1, was the first public school established in the town in 1813. This followed legislation in Albany in 1812 requiring towns in New York State to lay out school districts to promote public instruction of children. Although districts were drawn, it appears the Elmendorph School, named for the prosperous farmer who gave the land for the first school, served as the only public school for Red Hook for several years, drawing children from surrounding neighborhoods. Expenses at the annual meeting April 3, 1815, were listed in pounds, shillings and pence: “pail and mug, 5/2; boards, 15/; to carpenter for laying floor, one pound sterling.” The teacher was paid 4 pounds sterling a month. The school was very much the responsibility of the entire neighborhood. In a meeting in 1819, rules were laid down for supplying heat in winter: “The employers (referring to the parents in the district) will send half a load of wood a scholar to be brought to the schoolhouse on Saturday the 13th, cut short for the stove.” Further resolved: “That the taxpayers who have no wood attend that day with their axes and help cut wood.” In 1831, the district voted to build a new schoolhouse, raising \$155 to construct it and \$10 to paint it. The school closed in 1935.

Red Hook School, District #4, later the Union Free School

The original village school was built on a part of the John Armstrong property, adjacent to The Old Soap Factory on South Broadway, probably before 1815. It was said to have been constructed in large part of staves from tobacco hogsheads, used in the early days of the Red Hook Tobacco Factory business in the village. Around 1875, a new two-story school was built on the same site. Again, on the same site, a handsome red-brick elementary and high school was built in 1905. The first high school in town, it was renamed the Red Hook Union Free School. It was this school that burned in 1936, making way for centralization of the Red Hook districts.



Upper Red Hook, District#6. The building still stands although in altered condition

Fraleigh School, District #5

The Fraleigh School was located on the banks of the Saw Kill near the bridge by the Fraleigh dairy farm on Route 199 east of the village. Both the farm and the building, converted to a residence, are still there. The first records date to 1819. It is said the first school was built by Peter Fraleigh, the ancestor of Irving Fraleigh, who owns the farm today. Two more schools were built at the site before it closed in 1939. Records of 1824 show that 66 pupils were enrolled that year. The teacher’s wages were \$100 for the school year.

Upper Red Hook District #6

The two-story public school building was located across Old Post Road from the St. John’s Dutch Reformed Church. It still stands today, however without the ornate molding and trim that distinguished the old school. The public school building was built in 1879, and replaced an earlier school established in 1829. Tradition has it that the first school in Upper Red Hook, which was the main community in Red Hook for its first 150 years, was established early

in the 1800s just south of the church, though no written records exist. The public school in Upper Red Hook was supplemented by the Upper Red Hook Academy (later called the Mountain View Academy), a private school of some note, which drew students from throughout New York and New England. It was established through the efforts of Andrew Kittle, the Dutch Reformed minister, and other members of the Upper Red Hook community in 1822. Except for a period between 1842 and the late 1860s, it continued as a school until around 1880. It continued as a gathering place for the community as the local Grange Hall and St. John's church hall until it burned in 1917. It was replaced, an exact replica of the elegant old Academy, but burned again in 1954.

Barrytown School, District #8

In 1857, Robert Donaldson, the new owner of the Sylvania estate (later called Edgewater) in Barrytown, contracted with the well-known architect A.J. Davis to design several community buildings around the neighborhood, including a chapel and a school. The school was the Barrytown public school, now a private residence just east of Station Hill Road. It was built on a northeast corner of the Donaldson estate from timbers on the place. Before this, children traveled to Annandale to go to school. The school was used for religious meetings on Sunday evenings. Around 1910, the original one-room schoolhouse was expanded to serve between 60 and 65 students, ages 5 through 22 years old. Mr. L.L. Stillman was the first teacher, staying on for 20 years. When it closed in 1939, the school served about 35 children.

Annandale School, District #9

The first public school in Annandale was established by the founder of Bard/St. Stephen's College around 1857. John and Margaret Bard, whose home was "Annandale," built the small school (it is now Bard Hall, and the Bards' home is now Blithewood, both on the campus of Bard College) for the education of local children several years before establishing the college. They kept the school going. Mrs. Bard herself taught there for many years. When the Bards left for England after the death of their only son, it became necessary to find a new school. In 1868, another school was built near Route 9G, on land given by John A. Lewis, a prosperous farmer and landowner whose house still stands near Whalesback Road. The school first served around 35 students. It closed in 1930, and pupils were transferred to the Madalin School in present-day Tivoli.

Cokertown, Milan District #9

Once known as the Nelson Schoolhouse, the Milan public school at Cokertown, near Spring Lake, was built around the mid-19th century. The first teacher was a Mr. Nelson, an Englishman. The building, which is on Salisbury Road, served as a gathering place for the community as well as a school, hosting religious services and Christmas celebrations.

Rock City School or Sand Hill Academy, Milan District #7

The first school of record in this border hamlet between Red Hook and Milan stood in 1851 in the center of the village, on the southeast side of the junction of routes 308 and 199 (the present highway did not exist). It was a two-story structure with belfry and bell and could accommodate 46 pupils downstairs. The upper room was used, as was the custom with many country schoolhouses, for religious and civic meetings. Around 1892, a new school was built, which still exists as a private house, just east of the junction on the south side of the road. There was a winter term and a summer term in those days, with a vacation in the spring, according to the recollection of historian Burton Coon, who wrote about his life in the 1850s in Red Hook and Milan. The terms were to accommodate the farmers' planting and harvesting schedules, a practice seen throughout the country school districts in the last century.

White Schoolhouse, Link District #4 in Milan

The original White Schoolhouse was built about 1815 and was located north of the present schoolhouse that still stands on Academy Hill Road as a private house. It was built about 1840 on property of Henry Sipperley. Many Milan family names such as Morehouse, Shelly, Battenfeld, Thorn, Rowe, Jackson and Link were among the early students attending the country school. Ferris Jackson, who was born in 1856, reminisced about the White School in 1939, recalling the year 1861 when he was a student. There were 40 pupils at the time, ranging from 5 to 22 years. School term was from September 1st to March 1st, when it closed so that farm children could help their parents with spring planting. It reopened in April and closed again in June for summer vacation.

Willow Glen, Milan District #8

According to a Milan historian, the first meeting of the district was held in August of 1889. A one-story building was built on the road leading to Jackson Corners. The schoolhouse burned in the fall of 1897 and a new one was built on a site proposed by John Flack, whose name was sometimes associated with the school. A sum of \$325, to be paid in five installments, was borrowed to finance the building, according to the records. The 18x20-foot school was finished at a cost of \$245. The schoolhouse still stands, on Willow Glen Road.

Nevis School, Clermont District #1

According to local historian Robert Coon (born 1841), the original school in Nevis was probably established in 1779, on grounds purchased from Jacob Stall. It held about 40 students, between the ages of 5 and 20 years old, with attendance shrinking to half during spring planting. That schoolhouse was replaced in 1854 with one that served 65 pupils. Teachers often boarded with families. Doris Lasher Tieder of Rhinebeck has fond memories of the teacher who boarded near her parents' farm in Nevis. From the time she was 7 years old, she walked the one mile to the Nevis school from her farm. When he was old enough, she walked her younger brother. Her teacher, Mr. Sheely, would walk as well, striding along to school, "a square, black lunch box under his arm.... He

unlocked the building, put up the flag, cleaned the slate board, and brought in the day's drinking water from the well next door. We all used the same long-handled cup to drink from ... In cold weather he cleaned out the ashes from the potbelly stove, stoked it with coal, and set the fire for the day ... At precisely nine o'clock, he pulled the rope for the school bell."

Red Hook in 1939

On the eve of the big celebration for the new school in 1939 an historical event struck that would affect the small town of Red Hook, as well as the world, for the rest of the century.

Hitler invaded Poland on Sept. 1, 1939, several days before the Linden Avenue School was to be dedicated by Hudson Valley neighbor and President of the United States, Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Of course, he never came to the school that Saturday; he never left Washington. On an international level, the world would never be the same; on a national level, officials scrambled to foretell the impact, not yet realizing that it would be just two years and two months before the U.S. would enter the World War that was brewing. At home, organizers scrambled to rearrange the school dedication program, little realizing the impact the news would have on the very students they were preparing to usher into the new high school. Red Hook, their small town, would also never be the same.

Red Hook in 1939 was still primarily a farming community. Although change had been coming to town in the form of electricity, indoor plumbing, telephone, paved roads, and central heating for several decades, there were still many farms that did not have "modern" conveniences. The old Hucklebush Railroad that ran through town had folded just one year before. Fruit and dairy products were shipped by truck now, but they still dominated the town's economy. Some commuted to Poughkeepsie or Hudson for work. Cars were no longer uncommon but the Twilight Bus Line operated round trips to Poughkeepsie and Hudson four times a day, with trips on Saturday and Sunday, for the many commuters who had never owned a car.

There was no bridge traffic, because the bridge to Kingston would not be built for another 20 years. A car trip to Poughkeepsie was the major shopping event for many families, and then not too often. Red Hook had its own clothing store, shoe store, lumber yard, hardware store, farm-equipment retailer, feed store, appliance store, as well as the usual plumbing and heating, automobile sales and service, grocers, butchers and most every business to make the town self-sufficient. Those citizens wanting to reach Ulster County would go by ferry located at the Rhinecliff station. Commuters or travelers going south and north need not travel to Rhinebeck to the train, however: the New York Central stopped at stations in Barrytown and Tivoli, picking up passengers, as well as milk and produce from the farms daily. The transition to an automated society was not yet complete in 1939. That spring, the Kingston Horses Market on Broadway in Kingston advertised a special auction for Tuesday, Sept. 5, to auction off 100 head of horses, "single, matched pairs, ponies and saddle horses - all ready to go to work." But new conveniences meant progress to Red Hook residents, and they were proud of these developments, as sure as they were of their brand-new state-of-the-art school. "Red Hook residents don't pull up and tie old Dobbin to a hitching post anymore," announced the special triple "new school" edition of the *Red Hook Advertiser*, proudly, "They streamline into the curb in a shiny auto."

Operators at the Red Hook Telephone Company still personally routed calls upon request and a phone-dialing system would not be installed for several years. The Red Hook Milling Company, located at the old Mill Pond, was still in operation, selling cider, vinegar, fruit, feed and ice - a testament that many of Red Hook's citizens still used ice boxes, not refrigerators. At Shaeffer Stores and Aucock's Market, the two groceries in the village, chicken and leg of lamb were 25¢ a pound and clams, 10¢ a dozen. Homegrown peaches were five pounds for 25¢. And coffee, two pounds for 29¢. Malls had not been invented. Red Hook was still a place where you could buy your pork and your milk from a local farm. Chanler Chapman, the eccentric, colorful gentleman-farmer of Sylvania in Barrytown advertised hogs and milk that summer in his own distinctive voice: "House of Happy Pigs," ran the headline of the small ad in the *Advertiser*, "All our Grade A milk is standardized for richness as well as pasteurized for purity. The pigs get the skim milk. Therefore we call it the home of happy pigs.... Sylvania Farms, Barrytown, NY Tel. Red Hook 38-F5."

The week of the school dedication, the Lyceum Theater, was featuring "Clouds Over Europe" with Laurence Olivier, forecasting the war that was soon to involve every small-town American. At the moment, however, it was still a fiction, still entertainment. With the new school secured, and the storm over Europe sufficiently far away, the main things on Red Hook citizens' minds, reflected in the editorial pages of the local paper, were the need for door-to-door mail delivery in the village, paved sidewalks, curbing and house numbering. There was much that was to change in Red Hook, beside the education of its children, in the first week of September 60 years ago.



RECENT ACQUISITIONS

Our collections have continued to grow with exceedingly interesting contributions. Everyone interested in Red Hook history will join us in gratitude to the following donors:

Earl A'Brial, Mayor of the Village of Red Hook: sixty-two albums of newspaper clippings collected by Mrs. **Martha Ingleson**, whose daughter, **Lucille McCagg** added four additional volumes.

Red Hook Public Library: Thirteen original hand-drawn maps and documents collected by the late **Clara Losee** dated from 1764 to 1838, most relating to the **Straat** family.

Alice Bulkeley: Papers relating to the history of the **Heermance-Bulkeley** House, including State and National Register Nominations for one of Red Hook's oldest surviving structures.

Janet Loop: Eleven yearbooks, *Dimensions*, of the Red Hook Jr. High School 1984 - 1995 and a collection of records and deeds of **Henry and Gotlop Martin**.

Tom Brener: A 16mm film about people who worked in the old Tivoli brassiere and girdle factory.

Carol Brener: Book, *Rebels on Eighth Street: Juliana Force and the Whitney Museum of Art*, by Avis Berman, containing references to a summer spent in Red Hook.

Martha Herman: Historic books, photographs, newspapers and records collected by her mother, **Clara Losee**.



☛ FALL MEETING SCHEDULE ☛

All meetings are held at 7:30 p.m. at the Elmendorph Inn unless otherwise noted.

September 28	"Remembering the Red Hook Schools." Shared memories, moderated by Jack Lewis . 7:00 p.m.
October 26	"House Genealogy" with Sally Light , Austerlitz Town Historian and Author of <i>House Histories, A Guide to Tracing the Genealogy of Your Home</i> . (Copies will be available for purchase and autograph..)
November 16	"All About Barns" with Woody Klose .
December 14	"Remembering Christmas in Red Hook," our annual family Christmas Party.





FROM THE PRESIDENT'S KEYBOARD

Barbara Bielenberg

This summer I spent an afternoon in the sun-filled office of a young Vermont farmer whose meadows overlook the little village of Cabot, where all that good butter and cheese is manufactured. I went there to find out how a group of volunteers managed to produce a remarkable photo-filled book in which older Cabot residents reminisce about one-hundred years of change in their community.

The Cabot Oral History Committee was formed in 1994. With bake sales and flea markets they raised enough money to purchase recorders and transcribers. Over time they recorded more than ninety interviews, capturing memories of floods and fires, farming and milling, cheesemaking, and education. Their words brought to life the Great Depression and two World wars. Local government, the Cabot Creamery and private citizens provided grants to pay for the painstaking transcription of thousands of words into typescripts.

Meanwhile, my farmer friend scanned more than a thousand borrowed photographs into his computer, storing the images on CDs. The CDs were duplicated and copies given to the local library. The preserved images illustrate a century of people, places and activities. From them, photos were selected to complement the oral histories.

The dedicated volunteers of the Cabot Oral History Committee recognized that their community was changing. The cooperative creamery which had sustained local dairymen has been sold to a giant agribusiness. Milk prices provided a marginal income and fugitives from Hollywood and New York were paying good prices for rundown old farmhouses. Electricity, central heating, the motor car and the Internet have changed rural life forever in northern Vermont as they have here in Red Hook.

Are there any volunteers among *our* readers who would like to help preserve Red Hook's past before it disappears from memory?



Membership Renewals for the year 2000 are now being accepted!
PLEASE give us your new 911 address for use on future mailings.



TRUSTEES ELECT OFFICERS

At a special potluck dinner meeting and get-together held in the taproom of the Elmendorph Inn on July 20th, the Historical Society's new and returning Trustees elected officers for the 1999-2000 season.

Barbara Bielenberg will continue as President, with **Lloyd Loop** serving as Vice President. **Mary Cioffi** will continue as Treasurer while **Evelyn Seils** will join **Nancy Hetzler** as Co-Secretaries. **Clare O'Neill Carr** agreed to edit the *Newsletter*.



VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

If you enjoy refreshments and informal conversations after our monthly meetings perhaps you would be willing to bring a plate of cookies, or a beverage. A **Hospitality Coordinator** is badly needed to schedule the refreshments. In the meantime, please call Nancy Hetzler at 758-5716 to offer to help or to supply some baked goods or drinks.

Other volunteer opportunities include program planning, fund raising, mailings, assistance in our archive center and collecting and transcribing oral histories.





Egbert Benson HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RED HOOK

P.O. Box 1813 Red Hook, N.Y. 12571-0397

MEMBERSHIP FORM - 2000

Name(s) (Please Print)

Mailing Address

Telephone Number (Area Code)

ANNUAL DUES

Check appropriate line(s): make check payable to "Egbert Benson Historical Society"

Family \$12 Individual \$8 Student (under 18) \$1
Contributing \$25 Sustaining \$50 Life (\$100 or more)
Business or Organization \$15

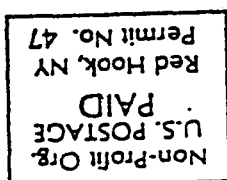
Additional contributions are most welcome and are eligible for company matches: DONATION \$

We invite you to help with the work of the Society. Please check here () if you would like to be contacted about volunteer opportunities.

BENEFITS OF MEMBERSHIP: • Advance notice of monthly meetings • Three newsletters each year • The knowledge that you support the collection, preservation and dissemination of the history of the Town of Red Hook.

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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



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